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HADDONFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

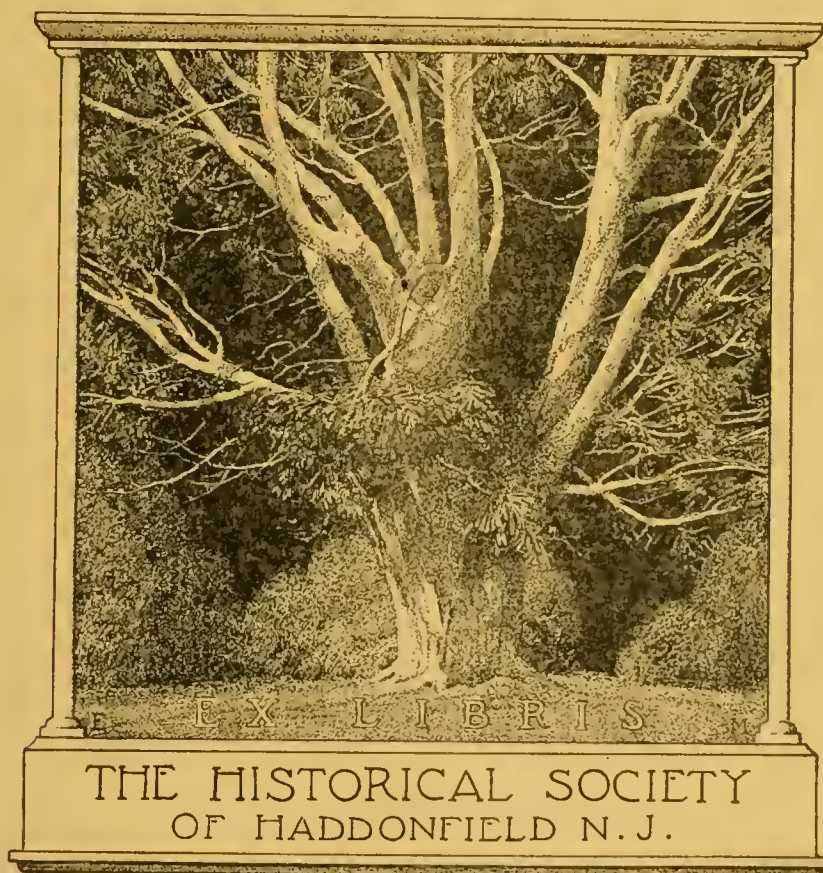
No. 1

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF MOUNTWELL

*By Julia B. Gill*

# THE TANYARD AND ITS OWNERS

*By Carrie E. Nicholson Hartel*



HADDONFIELD, NEW JERSEY

1922

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## *Prefatory Note.*



From time to time there have been read, at meetings of the Historical Society of Haddonfield, contributions to the history of the town of such importance that it has been thought they should be put into print for wider circulation.

The Society issues this, its first publication, believing the papers contained herein will prove of interest and value to its members and also to many other loyal citizens.

Future numbers will appear at intervals as contributions worthy of such preservation are made, and as the general interest in the story of Haddonfield seems to justify their publication.

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MOUNTWELL

By Julia B. Gill

The history of Mountwell, the first home and estate within the present limits of Haddonfield, begins in England where, on March 3, 1676, Francis Collins, afterward our first white settler, signed with many others "The Concessions and Agreements of the Proprietors Freeholders and Inhabitants of the Province of West New Jersey in America." This act was either in anticipation of purchase or may have been warranted by some land transaction earlier than any of which we have knowledge.

On June 2, 1677, an Indenture was made between William Penn, Gawen Lawry and Edward Byllinge of the one part, and Francis Collins, of Ratliff in the parish of Stepney in the County of Middlesex, Richard Mew and John Bull, whereby for the sums of 200, 100, and 50 pounds respectively, being the sums for which Edward Byllinge was indebted to them, Francis Collins and his two associates became the owners of a large tract of unsurveyed land in West New Jersey. This transaction confirmed him as a proprietor.

About a year later, the exact date not being known, Francis Collins came to America with his wife Sarah Mayham, his son Joseph, and his daughters Sarah, Rebecca, Priscilla, Margaret and Elizabeth. He was by trade a bricklayer and was a builder of brick structures. Their first home was at Burlington where they appear to have remained about four years.

Recalling that in 1677 he had become the owner of certain rights in unsurveyed lands, we find that on Oct. 23, 1682, Francis Collins located five hundred acres of land in Newton Township bounded on the west side by the King's Road. Two days after, he made another and adjoining survey of four hundred and fifty acres. This great estate of nine hundred and fifty acres extended from Cooper's Creek toward the settlement of Newton, covering a distance of a mile and a half and including a large part of the present Westmont. It lay on both sides of the King's Road for a distance of nearly a mile from the present Ellis street



toward Haddon Heights. The second purchase, four hundred and fifty acres, passed to Francis Collins' daughter, Sarah Dimsdale, intimate friend of Elizabeth Haddon, and on April first, 1725, it was sold by her and so it passed out of the Collins family.

Our special interest concerns the first purchase of five hundred acres, for here he built a home. In accordance with the English custom of having some particular name for each person's estate, he named his estate Mountwell. His house was built on the hill south of the King's Road, and to know beyond doubt just how that house looked would be a great satisfaction to us. Judge Clement, in his "First Settlers of Newton Township", gives the opinion that the dwelling of Francis Collins was in all probability only a rude wigwam; but when we recall his trade and the records of various brick buildings he had erected in England and at Burlington, we may venture to hold a different opinion from that of Haddonfield's venerated historian. About twenty-five years ago The Haddonfield Tribune published a photograph of the Mountwell residence together with the tradition that it was built previous to 1700. It was a brick building, and it requires no stretch of fancy to believe it was the house erected by Francis Collins and the earliest residence of any white man in the present Haddonfield.

But there was no Haddonfield then, and the home of Francis Collins was isolated, five miles from the little village of Newton and without intermediate settlements. Its loneliness may be realized by examination of Thomas Sharp's map made eighteen years later, which shows but five houses between Mountwell and Newton. The Mountwell residence was narrow and long, the inside doors were painted white and there was a large fireplace in the living room. At the southerly side of the house was a frame kitchen with a brick floor, and outside the corner of this frame kitchen was a good cistern with fine willow trees hanging over it. There was a well also, but the water was too deep to be reached. Fine shrubbery of lilac bushes and other varieties grew about the house. One of the members of this Society used to visit at this house about 1856, and

though at that time she knew nothing of its history, she recalls having the impression that the house was very old.

The period of Francis Collins' actual residence at Mountwell was quite brief, probably only seven years, from 1682 to 1689. His wife had died shortly after their arrival in America, and on Dec. 21, 1686, he married Mary Budd, daughter of Thomas Budd, an early settler and large landed proprietor and widow of Dr. John Goslin, a merchant and practicing physician of Burlington. She was thirty years younger than Francis Collins, and probably preferred the vicinity of Burlington as a place of residence; for in 1690, as shown by a deed, they were living in Northampton Township, Burlington Co., and there is no evidence that they ever again lived at Mountwell. It is much to be feared that Judge John Clement's charming account of the arrival of Elizabeth Haddon at Mountwell, as the guest of Francis Collins until her own home could be made ready, is not strictly accurate. It must have been Joseph Collins, his son, who was her host.

It appears from recorded documents that, upon the second marriage of Francis Collins, Mountwell was involved in a trust dated Dec. 21, 1686, to Robert Dimsdale and John Budd, for the use of any children that might be born of this marriage. This was done to guard against the operation of the law of descent in force at that day, which gave the oldest male child all the real estate of which the parent died seized. This trust was abrogated ten years later when the father, in connection with his wife and the trustees, conveyed Mountwell to his son Joseph by deed dated Nov. 18, 1696; and in 1717 the children by the second marriage released all their rights in this estate to their half brother. An old deed in possession of the writer tells of these agreements, and it may be interesting to quote here the exact language.

"This Indenture made the Seventeenth Day of the twelfth month called February In the Year of our Lord one thousand Seven hundred and twenty-four Between Joseph Collins of the Township of Newton In the County of Gloucester and Province of New Jersey Yeom: and Katherine his Wife of the one Part and John Estaugh of the sd Town-

ship County and Prrovince aforesd Yeom: of the other part Whereas ffrancis Collins father of ye sd Joseph Did by Virtue of Indenture of Lease and Release Bearing Date the first and Second days of June Anno Domini 1677 Purchased of Edward Billing and trustees four Seventh Parts of a Propriety of Land In West New Jersey in America and Pursuant to the Constitutions of the sd Province had Laide out & Surveyed unto him In ye aforesd Right five Hundred acres of Land In ye sd Township of Newton aforesd Called Mount Well And Whereas the said ffrancis Collins by Reason of a Marriage Intended Between him and Mary Gosling Did by Virtue of Indenture Bearing Date the twenty-first day of December Anno Domini 1686 Trypartite Between him sd Mary Gosling Robert Dimsdale & James Budd as Persons in trust Convey and make over unto them by way of Joynture and to the heirs of her Body by ye sd ffrancis ye aforesd five hundred acres of Land And Whereas by Virtue of Indentures Bearing Date the first day of the twelfth month Anno Domini 1716 and Standeth upon Record In the Records of Gloucester County In Book A folio 76 sd ffrancis Collins & Mary his Wife for the Consideration therein mentioned hath Conveyed and Confirmed ye sd Mount Well unto ye sd Joseph Collins and unto his heirs and assigns for Ever as allso by Virtue of a Release dated the twenty-second Day of Aprill Anno Domini 1717 and Standeth upon Record in sd Book in folio 78 John Collins ffrancis Collins Junie Thomas Kimball & Mary his Wife the heirs of the sd Mary Collins Widdow & Relict of the sd ffrancis Collins have sufficiently Released & Relinquished their Right & Title that they might have claimed by Reason of ye Deed of Trust by Way of a Joynture . . . . .”; and then the indenture relates a transaction by which Joseph Collins and his wife sold to John Estaugh two hundred and twenty-seven acres of “ye mount Land.”

Joseph Collins and his wife, Katherine Huddleston, resided at Mountwell from the time of their marriage, 7 mo. 1st, 1698, until Joseph's death, 7th mo. 13th, 1741, and the brick house witnessed the birth and growth of the grandchildren of its builder. Joseph and his wife executed to their son, Benjamin, a deed for a portion of the Mountwell tract fronting on the south side of the King's Road, retain-



ing to themselves a life estate therein. We will not follow the fortunes of this part of the original tract, since it did not include the home nor what we know now as Mountwell Woods.

In 1735 Joseph Collins and his wife conveyed to their daughter, Rebecca, and her husband, Samuel Clement, another part of the Mountwell tract. This part extended from the King's Road southwardly to a line running from Cooper's Creek westwardly. The consideration for this was £100, and the annual payment was £10 so long as either parent survived. This was the home tract and upon this property Samuel Clement and his wife, Rebecca Collins, lived for many years, and the brick house, now of venerable age, welcomed great grandchildren and great great grandchildren and sped them on their way to their own homes and experiences.

When Samuel Clement and his wife passed away the old house and the part of the Mountwell estate that was theirs evidently remained in the Clement family for many years. Nearly three-quarters of a century later, some time between 1826 and 1829, John Gill 4th, a direct descendant of Francis Collins through his son, Joseph, and Joseph's daughter, Rebecca Clement, became by purchase from Samuel Clement, called in the records Samuel Clement the Elder, the owner of 130 acres of the Mountwell tract, including the old house, and he went there to reside. Through some flaw of procedure John Gill 4th did not secure a perfected title deed until Sept. 1, 1838. The place was known in the Gill family as "the hill farm", the name Mountwell having almost disappeared from memory. John Gill 4th lived there until 1844, during which time John Gill 5th and William Gill were born there, and his wife Sarah Hopkins, great great granddaughter of Ebenezer Hopkins, died. In 1844 John Gill 4th removed from "the hill farm" to the Gill residence on the King's Highway, and with his departure the old brick house on the Mountwell estate saw its last of private family life and for the first time in one hundred and sixty-two years experienced occupation by those who were not of direct descent from its builder.

For a few years tenants occupied the staunch old home, and on March 23, 1854, John Gill 4th sold the property, 130

acres and the home. to the following persons: Walter D. Bell, William W. Fleming, Samuel Richards, all of Philadelphia, and William Coffin, of Newton Township, who formed the organization known as the Haddonfield Land and Improvement Company. Later a Pleasuring Ground was carried on there by Jesse Peyton and Charles Shinn. This place occupied about twelve acres. It was enclosed by a fine, high fence of close, wide boards with pointed tops. Visitors paid an entrance fee and found inside a one-story house about 75x25 feet, covered over, for enjoyment and shelter in stormy weather, while for sunny days there was a long open platform for dancing down near the stream. There was also a short race course, and a place for rifle shooting. The men who composed the Haddonfield Land and Improvement Company entertained the hope of building up a town on their tract, and they laid off a place for a railroad station. But their project failed of success. The tract went into litigation and passed through the hands of several owners. About 1869 and 1870 the owners were Henry Simons and his wife, Caroline. Apparently they represented the Vulcan Oil and Mining Company. They and others were defendants in a suit and Henry Allen was plaintiff. Randall E. Morgan, Sheriff of Camden County, gave to Henry Allen, the plaintiff, a deed for all the property Jan. 22, 1870.

Happy times came again to the old brick house when on July 6, 1870, Henry Allen sold Mountwell to Rev. T. Maxwell Reilly, and on March 29, 1871, his school, St. John's Academy, removed there from Burlington. Various additions and improvements were made to the old house, but it still preserved its ancient quality. Rev. Edward M. Reilly tells of having occupied a room on the top floor that had never been lathed and plastered. It was papered overhead with newspapers, and he recalls one which bore a date in 1844.

For nearly two centuries the old house had withstood the wear of time, a silent spectator of changes of customs, manners, and modes of thought. But tragedy was soon to overtake it. On or about April 15, 1872, it was destroyed by fire, and the most ancient landmark of Haddonfield passed away forever.

In June, 1909, a portion of the Mountwell tract became by purchase the property of the Borough of Haddonfield, and a second purchase was made by the Borough in October, 1915. Neither purchase included the site of Francis Collins' home, and on this spot now stands the residence of John S. Makin. The vast tracts of Francis Collins have been divided and subdivided through the years, and our beautiful town has grown up in its strength and dignity on his acres that were in his time a wilderness. But our own Mountwell Woods, with its fine old trees, charming ravines and grassy slopes perpetuates the name of the first estate in Haddonfield, and keeps alive the story of our first white settler, Francis Collins.





## THE TANYARD AND ITS OWNERS

By Carrie E. Nicholson Hartel

Although there have been two other tanneries in Haddonfield it is the one owned by Samuel Allen which we remember as it gave the name to Tanner Street.

The Tanyard as it was known for many years after all signs of the tannery had vanished was on the south side of the street between what is now No. 30 and No. 74, and extended back to beyond Rosedale Avenue.

The first record we have concerning it is an "Indenture made this fourth day of the fourth month called June in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and thirty foure Between John Estaugh of haddonfield in ye county of Gloucester and western division of ye province of New Jersey and Elizabeth his wife of ye one part and John Howell Late of Chester in ye province of pensilvania Tanner of ye other part Whereass John Haddon of London in Great brittain Smith Did by one Deed bearing Date" March 27th 1722 convey unto " John Estaugh and Elizabeth his wife"—"400 Acres of Land called and known by ye name of Haddonfield." Joseph Collins by indentures dated 11th & 12th of February 1724 conveyed unto John Estaugh 125 acres adjoining the above 400 acres.

John and Elizabeth Estaugh for the sum of twenty pounds sold to John Howell a tract of land "begining at a White Oak tree for a corner standing by ye side of ye lane that Goes from ye Kings Road (that Goes from Burlington to Salem) to ye Great Road that Goes to Coopers Ferry."

This same oak is a starting point in nearly all of the deeds. The land extended along the lane southeast from the trees 16 perches, was 20 perches deep and contained two acres.

The deed gave "full power to build Erect and make on the same such Dams and Slucies as shall be nessessary for ye Raising water to a conveinient head or height for supplying with water all such Tan Pitts or Vatts as ye sd John Howell shall think proper to make or plant thereon."

Five years later (1739) Howell leased the property to Isaac Andrews, tanner, of Haddonfield for one whole year for five shillings. The next day however John Howell and his wife Katrine gave Andrews a Release and sold him the place for 110 pounds securing him for seven years against any claim "whatsoever the quit rents thereout Issuing to our Sovereign Lord ye King and Arrearages thereof if any be only Excepted."

Twenty years after Isaac Andrews bought of Elizabeth Estaugh, widow, for 14 pounds 15 shillings, another piece of land on the Camden side of the first tract containing 1 Acre 1 Rood 36 Perches "strict measure." All of the later deeds say "more or less" or thereabouts."

The first mention of the house is in 1722, when William Logan Esquire of Philadelphia took a mortgage on the property for 487 pounds 8 shillings.

Andrews must have improved it and made the tannery pay or he could not have mortgaged it for about four times the price he paid for it; but hard times "on account of the war" must have come upon him; and possibly ill health for in that famous year of 1776 we find that he is dead and his widow conveys her right of dower in the premises to his executors, Mark Miller and Thomas Redman.

They "did expose same to sale by public vendue but could not procure such Price to be bidden as would be sufficient to pay mortgage and intrest" which by that time amounted to 636 pounds.

After trying in vain for three years to sell it the executors deeded it to Charles Logan, son of William, who had died in the meantime, who paid them five shillings and professed himself satisfied. Though I dont see why he should have been; he was a merchant and had no use for a tannery, especially one here, as he was in business in Petersburg, Va.

It was eight years before he found a purchaser, John Ward, Tanner, of Haddonfield, who paid 450 pounds, which shows it had been a very bad investment for the Logans.

1811 John Ward, yeoman, and Hannah, his wife, having moved to Deptford township, sold the tannery to Sam-

uel Brown, Jr., of Haddonfield, Tanner and Currier, for \$2400.

On Christmas Day of the same year, Samuel Brown bought nearly three acres more of James Estaugh Hopkins.

Samuel Brown and wife, Martha, after living at the Tanyard several years, went to New York to live, first giving Thomas Redman power of attorney to sell their two-story brick messuage, tanyard buildings, lot of ground, etc., including the Iron Bark Mill, stone table for finishing leather, etc., for not less than \$2200.

He sold the property to Thomas and Benjamin Borden, of Shrewsbury, N. J.

By that time it contained over six acres. The new surveyor did not mention the White Oak nor the lane but, for the first time,—Tanners Street. (1826).

Bordens probably did not operate the tannery for they soon sold it to Samuel Allen, also of Shrewsbury, who was the ninth owner of the land in just a little over a hundred years. He made some improvements, the most permanent being the roughcasting of the house as it is at the present time. It is No. 38 Tanner Street.

Mr. J. Lewis Rowand, to whom I am indebted for a description of the Tanyard says: "We intended moving from Rowandtown (Westmont) March 25th, (1843) but as the snow was so deep and the roads not broken we had to wait until April 1st. I was not quite seven years old, but from that time until I was twelve and started to go to school in Camden, I spent a great deal of my time there. My father kept me busy Saturdays getting wheelbarrow loads of tanbark to put on our garden paths."

There used to be a pond where Chestnut Street is, and the water ran from it into a ditch through the Tanyard property on its way to Hopkins Pond.

Along this ditch were large willows and under the largest one, measuring four or five feet in diameter and with limbs growing almost straight out from the trunk, was the pit in which the hides were placed, covered with lime, and left until the hair and surplus flesh and fat were loosened. A man wearing a leather apron that covered



him from neck to feet would lift, with heavy iron hooks, a hide from the pit and place it on a rounded wooden block, two or three feet long, probably a piece of buttonwood tree split in half. Then sitting on the ground he scraped, with an instrument like a carpenter's draw knife, all this hair and lime and flesh from the skin. It was a messy smelly job.

After this process the hides were ready to be tanned. But first the tan bark had to be ground.

As there is no hemlock near here, it was, no doubt, oak bark that was used, cut in the spring when the sap is beginning to run. It was brought in big wagons and unloaded at the barn which stood along the street. A bark mill, like a huge coffee mill, ground the bark after it was broken into small pieces, by being held against the rim of the iron bowl of the mill and hit with a wooden mallet. A rod went up from the center of this bowl and an arm extended from that to which was hitched a horse who walked around the mill.

The vats, in rows, were at the side of the house, near where Wilkins Avenue is now. They were about six feet deep and a little longer than a hide, lined with heavy planks, and one end partitioned off in such a manner as to allow the water to filter through into the small compartment, which held a pump. A hide was put in a vat and covered with tan-bark, another hide and more bark until the vat was full, and then water from the well was pumped into it. The vats were connected by troughs; when the water in the last vat became dark it was pumped out into the ditch and water from the next vat was pumped in, and so on until the first vat was reached, then that was filled up with fresh water. When all the tanning qualities were out of the bark the vats were cleaned out and fresh bark put in.

Along the street was a worm fence, the hides were hung on that to dry, and in the workshop were marble tables on which they were finished. These tables have been cut up and made into tombstones, and are at Coles-town at the graves of Samuel Allen, Mary Allen, Mickle Clement and Mary W. Clement.

On account of ill health Samuel Allen gave up business. James White took charge of the tannery for him for a few years, but it must have been abandoned by 1870, for



Samuel N. Rhoads remembers falling into the empty vats about that time.

Mr. Rowand says: "My mother used to send me to Neighbor Allen's to get a cent's worth of cream, and she was noted for giving good measure. She was a real neighbor, everybody loved her, she was a good Christian woman." Everyone who remembers her bears witness to her loving kindness and mercy in time of sickness or other adversity. Her husband, from all accounts, must have been both bigoted and cantankerous.

Mary Allen was an esteemed minister of the Hicksite Friends and though Samuel Allen spoke also, his bitter denunciations of the Orthodox Friends must have made him many enemies. He had hooks and eyes on his clothes as buttons were too fancy. He wore a broadbrimmed white beaver, and in bad weather, a heavy brown veil to prevent asthma.

For many many years, a large earthenware urn stood in the side yard of the house. Tradition says it once belonged to Elizabeth Haddon. In order to better preserve it, about fifteen years ago it was moved to A. W. Clement's yard, where, the next Hallowe'en, it was thrown over and broken.

Until a few years ago, in the front rooms of the house, in both first and second stories, were corner fireplaces with little cupboards. In the kitchen is a very large one, in the back of it under a shed are iron doors which open to reveal an oven. The attic over the back part of the house is unplastered, and where it is joined to the front roof is a space where Samuel Allen kept his money. We have never been able to find any which he overlooked. We did see, however, the usual attic junk, old books and papers, andirons, spinning wheels and firebuckets.

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Mrs. Warren P. Valentine  
W. DeWitt Vosbury  
Edward B. A. Walton  
Joseph Walton  
R. Cooper Watson  
Mrs. John W. Wescott  
Joseph M. Weston  
Mrs. Joseph M. Weston  
James Willits  
Mrs. James Willits  
Mrs. John Gill Willits  
Mrs. Samuel A. Willits  
Mrs. S. Abbott Willits  
Thomas H. Willson  
Mrs. Thomas H. Willson  
Benjamin T. Wood  
Mrs. Laura C. Wood



## DECEASED MEMBERS

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George J. Bergen  
Peter V. Bergen  
Col. Alexander O. Brodie  
Rev. Joseph M. T. Childrey  
Mrs. Edward H. Clement  
Howard A. Clement  
Mrs. Tillie C. Craven  
Mrs. Frances T. Evans  
Miss Elizabeth T. Gill  
Walter L. Hinchman  
Dr. William S. Long  
Eyre Mercier

Henry J. Neal  
Miss Laura K. Nippes  
Thomas O. Peirce  
Miss Amelia W. Robinson  
Dr. John R. Stevenson  
J. Fithian Tatem  
Mrs. Benjamin F. Whitecar  
Rowland Willard  
John Gill Willits  
Samuel A. Willits  
S. Abbott Willits





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